

Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd and Clay Lake Farm Ltd

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Consultancy

Planning, Design and Access Statement
Proposed Glasshouse Development
Land off Clay Lake Bank, Spalding

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The applicant company consists of the Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd and Clay Lake Farm Ltd. Subject to a satisfactory planning consent being received, there is an agreement in place for the freehold of the site to be transferred from Clay Lake Farm Ltd to Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd.
- 1.2. Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd currently operates from 17ha of glasshouse production in the Lincolnshire area, employing over 700 people at peak times and is one of the largest ornamental plant producers in the UK, growing a range of crops including shrubs, vegetables, bedding plants, herbs and perennials.
- 1.3. Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd operates from Horseshoe Road, Spalding and this modern automated site provides some of the highest quality growing facilities in the UK, setting the standard for future development.
- 1.4. The application site measures 39.5ha, comprising 28ha of state of the art glasshouses, with the remainder being packing areas, offices, parking and turning, surface water attenuation and circulation space.
- 1.5. The main aim of this development is to both highlight and strengthen the South Holland area as a key horticultural hub within the UK. The “buy local” theme has strengthened over the years, as it tends to reflect the security of supply and sound provenance of where products are grown. Moreover, this development would aid local business activity; playing a role in the economic vitality of the area by reducing the leakage of wealth from the district.
- 1.6. Another aim of the development is to create a positive environmental impact on the area and the UK as a whole. The development would see the horticultural sector invigorate the supply chain by supplying goods and services currently imported from outside the region. This would see the production of ornamental plants, which normally takes place in Holland and Belgium, being grown in larger quantities in Spalding. This replacement of imports will, therefore, have direct benefits on the environment, as there will be fewer lorry deliveries to the area reducing carbon miles.

- 1.7. The application is supported by a Transport Statement and Travel Plan, which assesses the impact of the proposal on the local highway network and its accessibility by those visiting and working at the site, a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy and, a Phase 1 Protected Species Survey that considers ecology.
- 1.8. Pre-application discussions with the local highway authority, the Historic Environment department of the County Council (archaeology) and the Local Planning Authority have also informed the application.
- 1.9. The proposal complies with the provisions of the development plan and there are no technical reasons why the development cannot come forward.
- 1.10. The proposed development will create a positive impact on the environment and support a prosperous rural economy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

2. APPLICATION SITE AND CHARACTER OF THE AREA

- 2.1. The application site is roughly rectangular in shape and consists of three agricultural fields totalling 39.5ha. The northern boundary is defined by Clay Lake Bank, with the A16 immediately to the north west and west of the site. The remaining east, south and western boundaries are defined by agricultural drainage dykes separating the surrounding fields.
- 2.2. The land is classified as Grade 2 on the Land Classification map of England & Wales and therefore is some of the heaviest land around Spalding. Historically, the land will really only grow combinable crops and some sugar beet rather than vegetables / potatoes.
- 2.3. The land is largely flat and there are no buildings on or adjacent to the site. There are field drains within and on the boundary of the site, and a few trees and short lengths of hedgerow that are considered in the accompanying Protected Species Survey.
- 2.4. Access to the site is via the existing access from Clay Lake Bank, close to the junction with the A16. The proposal includes the minor re-alignment of Clay Lake Bank in the vicinity of the site access in order to facilitate the turning of HGVs into the site. These minor works are achievable within existing highway land and are explained in more detail with the Transport Statement that accompanies this application.
- 2.5. The character of the area is defined by the A16, which is slightly raised in comparison with the surrounding farmland. The road functions as a by-pass and is subject to the national speed limit.

3. PLANNING POLICY

South Holland Local Plan

- 3.1. The policies set out here are the relevant saved policies from the South Holland Local Plan 2006.
- 3.2. Policy SG1 states that all proposals for development will be permitted where the development follows the principles of sustainable development.
- 3.3. Policy SG4 refers to development in the countryside and that development will only be permitted if it cannot be reasonably accommodated within defined settlement limits. Sequentially, the area of land in question cannot be accommodated on any industrial allocation and, having regard to the nature of the use, the development should not be located on industrial land if there were any available.
- 3.4. Policy SG6 relates to community infrastructure and impact assessments of a development. In particular, how some large developments require a submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment. In line with the regulations, we have submitted an Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Opinion to South Holland District Council and it has confirmed that the proposal is not Schedule 2 development.
- 3.5. Policy SG7 relates to energy efficiency and how all development with a floor space of 1000 m² or more needs to demonstrate good practice in energy efficiency.
- 3.6. Policy SG11 states that “development generating surface water run-off, likely to result in increased flood risk, will be permitted provided that:
 - The development’s surface water management system accords with sustainable development principles and has been designed as part of the development layout; and
 - The system will effectively control and adequately mitigate or attenuate any adverse effects from surface water run-off on people, habitats of acknowledged importance and property; and
 - Developers can ensure long term maintenance of the drainage systems, where necessary through planning obligations.”

- 3.7. As the proposal will incorporate sustainable drainage principles on site to capture surface water run-off, treat it and then reuse this water within the glasshouses, there will be no adverse impact on other land uses or users. In addition, the submitted Flood Risk Assessment demonstrates that the site is safe from flooding.
- 3.8. Policy SG13 relates to pollution and contamination and that development proposals will only be granted planning permission if they:
- do not cause unacceptable levels of pollution of the surrounding area by noise, light, toxic or offensive odour, airborne pollutants or by the release of waste products;
 - provide, as necessary, appropriate treatment of land to clean up pollution and contamination.
- 3.9. There is no contamination on site at present and there will be no pollution to the atmosphere from the biomass boiler, as it is designed to meet air quality standards. It is not proposed as part of this application to install lighting within the glasshouses, so there will be no light pollution. In the event that lighting did become necessary in the future, glasshouse 'blinds' will be installed that are designed to reflect light back onto the plants rather than spilling from the glasshouses and illuminating the night sky. The proposal will lead to a reduction in pollution by minimising the need to import produce from Holland and Belgium.
- 3.10. Policy SG14 refers to the design and layout of new development, stating that any new proposal should make a positive contribution to the visual quality of its surroundings. As the proposal is not surrounded by existing development and instead borders agricultural fields, the A16 and Clay Lake Bank, no existing development will be affected by the proposal. The proposal is a large and functional development that requires a rural location and, as such, assimilating it into a flat landscape is largely impossible. Glasshouses, however, are synonymous with the South Holland landscape and, in this respect, the proposal will not be out of keeping with this part of Lincolnshire.
- 3.11. Policy SG15 states that new development should facilitate its safe and convenient access by road users, pedestrians and cyclists whilst accommodating the potential increase in movement generated by the proposal. As previously mentioned, Clay Lake Bank will be widened to accommodate the turning of HGVs into the site.

- 3.12. Policy SG16 refers to parking standards in new development and that proposals will be required to provide appropriate parking and servicing arrangements and these are shown on the submitted site plan.
- 3.13. Policy SG17 refers to the protection of residential amenity and, as there is no residential development close to the application site, there will be no adverse impact arising from the proposal.
- 3.14. Policy SG18 states that the landscaping of new development, where appropriate, should incorporate landscaping proposals and landscaping strategy. There is little scope for landscaping within the application site, having regard to the proximity of field drains coupled with the adverse impact planting would have on the effectiveness of the growing areas within the glasshouses. Planting on the periphery of the site would simply draw attention to the development in a landscape where there is little in the way of planting at present.

South East Lincolnshire Local Plan

- 3.15. The South-East Lincolnshire Local Plan is currently at the examination stage and, as such, the relevant policies can be afforded little weight.

National Planning Policy

- 3.16. The NPPF sets out Central Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
- 3.17. Paragraphs 6 and 7 of the NPPF confirm the commitment to sustainable development based on three dimensions:

“an economic role - contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

a social role - supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.”

3.18. This is followed by a commitment to a presumption in favour of sustainable development and at paragraph 14, “For decision-taking this means:

- approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and
- where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
 - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.”

3.19. Paragraph 28 confirms the commitment to supporting a prosperous rural economy:

“Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;
- promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres; and

- promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.”

4. DESIGN AND ACCESS

Use

- 4.1. The application site is used for agriculture and is surrounded by other agricultural fields.
- 4.2. The proposal is for a large scale horticultural use and is, therefore, appropriate in an open countryside location.
- 4.3. Sequentially, the area of land in question cannot be accommodated on industrial land or within the settlement limits, as there are no sites sufficiently large enough. Having regard to the nature of the use, the development should not be located on industrial land even if there were any available.
- 4.4. There is a requirement for the site to be located near to the strategic road network and the chosen location will also benefit from being in close proximity to the proposed rail interchange at Deeping St Nicholas.
- 4.5. Access to the site is via an existing junction that was constructed by the then Department of Transport, accordingly, the chosen location will not result in the need for a new access onto the A16.
- 4.6. The proposed use, therefore, can be considered appropriate in this location in accordance with Local Plan policy SG1 and SG4.

Layout

- 4.7. The access to the site is located at the north off Clay Lake Bank, where it is also proposed to locate the parking spaces for HGVs, vans and cars. The dispatch and office areas are also in the northern part of the site, with the remainder of the northern section being used for packing and storage.
- 4.8. The indicative layout plan shows that the rest of the site is predominately taken up by the growing area, which covers an area of 28ha of glasshouses consisting of a number of production stages and areas for different products.

- 4.9. The biomass plant is located as central as possible to the growing areas to aid efficient distribution of heating. A roadway runs down the western boundary to enable biomass fuel consisting of wood chip and pelletised wood to be brought to the boilers.
- 4.10. Surface water lagoons are an essential element of the proposal, as they both deal with rainwater associated with the large surface area of glass and also enable the Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd to reuse water in the production areas.

Scale

- 4.11. The application site itself equates to an area of 39.5ha, with the glasshouse area itself covering 28ha.
- 4.12. The glasshouses will be 7m to the ridge and 6m to the eaves, with the dispatch and office area being the 9.3m to the eaves and 10.2m to the ridge. The glasshouses consist of repeated 4.3m wide bays.

Appearance

- 4.13. Typically, the glasshouses will be constructed in clear glass set in an aluminium frame with automatic computer controlled ventilation in the roof. The dispatch and office areas will be clad in plastic coated profile sheeting, the colour of which is yet to be chosen.
- 4.14. The site will be visible from the roads surrounding the site, these include the A16 to the west, north and south; Cowbit Road to the south and south east; Mill Drove to the east and Clay Lake Bank to the north.
- 4.15. South Holland and Spalding, in particular, is known for its horticulture and there are numerous such businesses in the area. Somewhat obviously, glasshouses have a purely functional appearance and cannot be designed using different materials.

Landscaping

- 4.16. The South Holland landscape is, in the main, typified by large open areas of farmland with little landscaping. Modern agricultural practices maximise the land available and so, over the years, field sizes have increased and permanent planting reduced. Planting is only apparent when closer to existing settlements and around other manmade features, such as the old railway line to the north of the application site.

- 4.17. Having regard to the relatively low vertical scale of the proposal (the small section at the north of the site being the highest at 11.4m), the application will be glimpsed from the surrounding roads. The principal views will be from the A16 when travelling north and south. The views, however, are relatively fleeting due in part to the curvature in the road alignment.
- 4.18. Traditionally, the flat open landscape ("big sky") has accommodated significant forms of development including windfarms and the two power stations within the district. The latest addition to the landscape will add to the 'ripple' of development on the horizon, which will still be dominated by the huge skies above.
- 4.19. Any proposed planting to the boundary of the site would have to be significant in order to provide appropriate screening and would merely serve to draw attention to the development and, in time, would have a greater impact in the landscape than the development.
- 4.20. Planting would also have an impact on the production areas by virtue of shading. A significant area of glasshouses would be lost to ensure that the planting was far enough away (and taking into account future growth heights) to avoid any shading. The planting will also unfortunately encourage birds, and leaf drop will cause issues on the large expanse of glass roof.
- 4.21. Having regard to the points above, the proposal will not have a negative impact on the wider character of the landscape and what limited localised impact might be created is not considered to be so adverse to warrant significant planting, which, in itself, will draw attention to the site and create long term operational difficulties for Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd's business.
- 4.22. The proposal, therefore, complies with local plan policy SG18.

Access

- 4.23. Prior to the submission of the application, informal discussions only were held with Lincolnshire County Council as local highway authority and planning officers from the local planning authority confirming the acceptability of the access serving the proposal.

- 4.24. Access to the site is via Clay Lake Bank from the existing junction off the A16. The access proposal includes the minor widening of Clay Lake Bank junction to accommodate the turning path of HGVs associated with the proposal.
- 4.25. The accompanying Transport Statement sets out the impact of the proposal on the local highway network and concludes that the proposal is acceptable in highway terms.

5. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. The development is located in Flood Zone 3a on the Environment Agency's 'flood map for planning', as is the vast majority of Spalding and the surrounding areas.
- 5.2. A Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy have been submitted with this application and these demonstrate that the application site is safe from flooding and that surface water can be satisfactorily dealt with without leading to flooding elsewhere.
- 5.3. In order to ensure flood damage is minimised, flood resilient measures will be incorporated into the design of the packing and dispatch areas to ensure business continuity in the event of a flooding incident.
- 5.4. An extended Phase 1 Habitat and Protected Species Survey has been carried out and this concludes that there are no protected species within the site or in the adjacent field drains. Measures to enhance biodiversity will be carried out where possible, but, having regard to the nature of the development, these are limited.
- 5.5. Pre-application consultation with the County Council's Historic Environment Officer has revealed the need to do extensive archaeological investigation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1. The proposal represents a major investment in the horticultural industry that South Holland is synonymous for, but one that has taken a dip in recent years.
- 6.2. Bridge Farm Nurseries Ltd is a successful local company at the forefront of glasshouse plant production and one with significant expansion plans within the district.
- 6.3. The application site measures 39.5ha in total, comprising 28ha of glasshouses with the remainder used for parking, turning, access roads and plant, together with surface water attenuation ponds.
- 6.4. Production under glass will allow those plants traditionally imported to be grown here in order to meet the needs of the expanding UK market.
- 6.5. South Holland, and Spalding in particular, is known for its horticultural heritage and, therefore, the proposed development will be in keeping with the character of the area.
- 6.6. The proposal will contribute towards the local economy by creating jobs and inward investment.
- 6.7. The current uncertainty over the impact of Brexit provides a good opportunity for UK production to grow and reduce the need for imported goods.
- 6.8. The proposed development accords with provisions of the development plan and, in particular, saved policies SG1, SG4, SG6, SG7, SG11, SG13, SG14, SG15, SG16, SG17, SG18 of the South Holland Local Plan and paragraphs 6,7,14 and 28 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 6.9. The technical reports demonstrate that the proposal will have no adverse impact on any areas of known interest and is acceptable in all other respects.

